

## **Transcript of President's Phonecast**

*Mickey:* Good evening and welcome. My name is Mickey Munley. I'm here on the University of Minnesota campus with President Eric Kaler for the largest and first-ever statewide alumni phone call. President Kaler has told me that he is very interested in answering as many questions as he can this evening, and we wanted to let you know, as several hundred people are joining us as we are speaking, that the way to do that is to press "0." If you press 0 at any time, it lets us know and we will try to get to as many questions as we can. But without further ado—President Kaler, how are you this evening?

*President Kaler:* Thanks, I'm doing great, Mickey, thanks. And good evening, everyone. I am really excited about this rare opportunity for me to chat with so many of you, who care about the University as much as I do. I'm here to tell you tonight a little bit about what's going on at the U these days, but mostly I'm eager to hear from you and try to take as many questions as I possibly can. Now, as Mickey mentioned, if you want to ask a question, press 0 on your keypad now or at any time during our conversation. You will be connected to an operator who will help you. We just started calling our alumni, and I can see we already have about 2,200 of you on the call. That's a good number, and it's going to be fun.

*Mickey:* That's right, and one other thing that we can do while we're waiting for people to join here is, we have a question for you. I've been learning a little bit about some of the Minnesota traditions, and so we would like to know what your favorite Gopher tradition is. So as people are joining you can go ahead and vote. We're curious—What is your favorite Gopher tradition? If it was the shoe tree on campus, press 1. If it's watching Goldy spin his head, press 2, attending homecoming would be 3, playing Frisbee on the Northrop Mall in the spring is 4, and demonstrating outside of Morrill Hall is 5. So please let us know—we'll report the results as we move further into the phonecast. But again, please press 0 at any point if you have a question. So, it's been a good spring so far here on campus, huh, President Kaler?

*President Kaler:* It sure has. This is a great call to make and start talking about good things at the University of Minnesota. Let me remind the new folks coming online about our polling question--What is your favorite Gophers tradition? Using your keypads, it is #1 the shoe tree on campus, #2 watching Goldy spin his head, #3 attending homecoming, #4 playing Frisbee on Northrop mall in the spring, or #5 demonstrating outside Morrill Hall. Now as you push your keypad to vote, let me tell you how important you, as alumni, are to the University. First of all, you can help our students a lot. If you want to get involved, I'll tell you more about all the opportunities at the end of the call. Your opinions matter to me. I also want you to know that right now our University is in demand. We received a record 42,000 applications—that's about 15 percent more than we received last year—for around 5,400 slots in next fall's class. The ACT entrance exams scores for our freshman class last fall were the highest ever, and we have the most National Merit Scholars of any Big Ten public school. All of that adds value to your University of Minnesota degree and mine.

Mickey: All right, so if I could interrupt for a sec, President Kaler, it looks like we have someone with their first question, and that would be Greg in Minneapolis. He's CLA class of '67, and he has a question about some of the budgetary decisions I think you're looking at. Greg, you're on live, go ahead with your question.

Greg: Yeah, my question is about the administrative costs at the University. We've had, I think, the New York Times investigating the University, and I was wondering if there are too many administrative costs at the University.

President Kaler: You know we've been focused on administrative costs like a laser ever since I got here a year and a half ago, and my predecessor worked on it too. We have a program around operational excellence that is achieving some really great results. You may know that we have eliminated the systemwide office for academic administration, saving about 1.1 million in recurring funds. We've merged our two foundations, which will save another million. We have consolidated our server forms for computers, which are saving us millions of dollars, and the list goes on and on. We're focused hard on this, and we have to do that because we need to put our resources into delivery of our mission, and we need our back office activities to be as efficient and effective as they can be. Again, we are working on that every day to put our money where it matters the most. Now I will also tell you that people who do administrative jobs at the University do do important work, and a lot of it, whether it is advising our students, helping manage our research enterprise, or improving our graduation rates. It's important to have people behind the scenes working for us. But we are working as hard as we possibly can to drive those costs down.

Mickey: Greg, thank you for your question. We are going to go to Joan, who is from the Nursing School in 1970. She has a question about the health sciences. Joan, you're on live with your question. Go ahead.

Joan: Thank you very much for taking my call. My question is probably more of a concern, which was, I am a proud alumni of the School of Nursing, but I was very concerned about the press that landed on the lap of the School of Nursing and Dean Connie Delaney after some of the informational technology people that were brought in and some of the scandal around that. It seemed like it was leaving a black eye, primarily at the foot of the School of Nursing. I just, I actually, thought that probably a little bit greater accountability should be required of even our dean, and so I'm interested in knowing what things are happening with that.

President Kaler: Well I'm not sure I know all of the background around that. But I will tell you that we are working hard at driving our informatics capability at the University forward. That is going to be a cornerstone for all of our research areas, but particularly in the health sciences. You know, we bring people to the University and we do our best, and sometimes things don't work out the way we'd like them to, but we are fully focused on the role of informatics. Our College of Nursing is doing a lot of really important things. We've got a great new interprofessional center, which brings training for a variety of health professionals into one place. National leader in our Doctor of Nurse Practitioner activity. So

there are a lot of really good things there, and, unfortunately, in the newspaper you did read about things that don't work out too well.

Mickey: All right, thank you very much. Now Darrell in Cannon Falls has a question about access and tuition costs. Darrell, you're on live. Go ahead with your question.

Darrell: Yes, I am concerned when I went to the U back in the late 60s and early 70s and my wife too. Tuition was about \$128 to \$135 a quarter, and we both worked our way through school without our parents' help, and now with the high price of tuition I do not think it is possible for a person to do that. My concern is really for my grandkids. My son was able to get through there with some military help. The tuition is out of sight, and it is supposed to be a public institution, and it should allow for people to work their way through. Anyway, is something being done about the high cost of tuition?

President Kaler: Well, I worry about that as much as you do. We need to keep the public in public higher education. What you have seen over these years is a pretty dramatic shift—not so much the increase in the cost of education but a dramatic shift in who pays for it. When you were a student here, the State of Minnesota partnered with you and invested with you in your future. Over the past few years, about five years since 2008, the state of Minnesota has cut funding to the University at a higher rate than any other state in the Big Ten, with the exception of Michigan. Right now we have the fourth highest tuition of the eleven public schools in Minnesota. We are working on this as hard as we can. Last year my budget had a 3.5 percent increase in tuition, the lowest in the last 12 years. This year the leading feature of the budget request I'm making to the state is to help us partner to freeze tuition for the next two years. That requires the state to reinvest in this institution, recognizing that they have taken 140 million dollars out of our appropriation in the past five years. Really trying to get that investment back and to understand the burden that tuition is causing for our students and their families. The fact that it drives student debt, now the average student who graduates with debt from the University is about \$27,000 in debt, but one third of our students graduate with no debt. So to me it's really a conversation with the state of Minnesota about the value of public higher education and helping us make it as affordable as possible.

Mickey: Okay, Darrell, great question—thank you so much. Now we are going to go to John in Minneapolis, and he is the class of '83 and he has a question about research at the University. So go ahead John, you're on live with your question.

John: Yes, my concern centers around land grant institutions, including the University of Minnesota. It seems that we have lost perhaps the best and the brightest of our professors to private industry. I would imagine these days a Norman Borlaug would be owned by Cargill. A Najarian would be owned by some giant pharmaceutical or medical company. What is the University doing to contain—keep those people in the University and not allowing them to go away? Loss of status to land grant institutions.

President Kaler: Sure, that is a great question. You ought to know that this university is the eighth largest public research university in the country in terms of our research

expenditures. We spend about \$800 million a year on research. So we have a lot of people who are competing at the very top of their game. Nonetheless, you have raised an interesting point, which is how public institutions can become farm schools, if you will, for private institutions or for industry. We work hard to not have that happen, but that means you need the resources to recruit and retain the very best faculty in the world. We do compete against private institutions that in many cases have deeper pockets than we do. Overall, the state of our research enterprise is healthy, and we hire our first choice faculty when we go out to get them. But your concern is a valid one, and you do not want to see a shift where the best and brightest are either in private institutions or in industry. We are working hard to make sure that doesn't happen.

*Mickey:* Excellent, John, thanks for your question. And that's a reminder to all of you, if you have a question for President Kaler please press "0." We have several of you who are waiting, and we are going to get to as many folks as we can, and if you have a question, please press 0 at any point. We are going to go to Lynn now with a question about in-state—oops, we lost Lynn. We are going to John now in Minnetonka. He has a question about balancing the needs of graduate programs. John, you're on live with President Kaler. Go ahead, please.

*John:* Hi Eric, I know you got your Ph D. in engineering, I did English in '81. I'm wondering, and I'm not sure if there is an answer for this, but I'm wondering how you think about balancing the need for a robust graduate program in humanities and social sciences on the one hand in a major research university with the dismal academic job market that has been characteristic of, you know, for the last 35 years.

*President Kaler:* Yeah, that is a great question, and we have to be mindful that much of those advances in those fields social sciences and humanities, and I will make a distinction between those in a few minutes if I can. Those are fundamental advances that lead to better society, to a better quality of life, to a richer quality of life, but the opportunities to pursue those fields in the academic markets are, as you're saying, restricted. I think we need to look at changing our culture so that pursuing an advanced degree in the humanities and then going out and working in industry or an NGO or another nonacademic environment is perfectly okay. It's important to be able to do that kind of graduate work and create that knowledge, but if you go and find a job outside that field, our faculty should be encouraging people to do that and enabling them to look beyond just the academic points for their employment. The other thing to do in the social sciences and humanities, which I'm encouraging and I think many in our College of Liberal Arts are engaged in, is really rethinking those disciplines, making them more relevant, focusing on more contemporary problems and looking across disciplines that interest the areas of intellectual inquiry that can lead to real value. That's easier I think sometimes in the social sciences, but in the humanities, you know the value of art and culture, music, to our society is enormous, and we don't ever want to step away from that investment and the richness that it brings to us.

*Mickey:* All right, great question. Now Brenda in Arden Hills also has a question about why someone should choose the U these days to go to school. Go ahead Brenda, you're on live with your question.

Brenda: Yes, I graduated in 1990 and it was a source of pride to be able to be saying you were going to the University of Minnesota and graduating from there. I currently have a junior, a sophomore, a 6th and a 5th grader, and they have, the oldest two have gone to St. Thomas, and they're looking at Iowa State. They've gone to the U of M for a campus tour. Can you tell me why my kids and my money should go to the University of Minnesota to get their education?

President Kaler: Sure, great question. And I think that your children and your money should come to us because they're going to get a great opportunity to be in a research university, they're going to be rubbing shoulders with people at the front of their field, creating new knowledge that other institutions will teach. The richness, the variety of activities, the options we have at the University is really just mind-blowing, and I'm still surprised when I run across opportunities for students to engage in creative ways, whether its Engineers Beyond Borders or Habitat for Humanity or the Tesla Club, which is our inventors club. It's just such a richness of opportunities for students to come and grab hold of a way of thinking or an activity that they might not have had any idea existed is important. I went to a very small school as an undergraduate, and there weren't those kinds of options for me, and I think being able to have this huge smorgasbord is a real plus. And I will tell you that the U is a great option for many students, but some find it to be big and hard to move around. I'd encourage them to give it a second look and evaluate all of the things that can be done outside the classroom at the U.

Mickey: All right, Brenda, that was a great question. Thank you very much. I wanted to let everybody know again if you have a question to press zero. We've had over 9,000 people with us here this evening and looking forward to getting to as many more questions as we can. You all told us what your favorite Gopher tradition was a little bit ago, and it looks like attending homecoming won out. Thirty-two percent of the folks on the phonecast chose homecoming and 27 percent said watching Goldy spin his head. So those are everybody's favorite Gopher traditions. All right now, we're going to go to Larissa in Fergus Falls. Larissa you're on live with a question about rural health care. Go ahead with your question.

Larissa: Yes, thank you. I have the opportunity, and I really appreciate the opportunity, to work with a lot of the health profession students out of a lot of the different schools at the University of Minnesota. And I'm wondering what are your thoughts on ensuring that students continue to have opportunities on working outside of the metro area in the hopes that they will practice outside of the metro area.

President Kaler: That's a critically important question. Health care in greater Minnesota is being provided by a cohort of professionals who are nearing retirement age, and we need to be sure to be able to replace them with the next generation. And one of the elements of our legislative initiative is actually a loan forgiveness program for health professionals who do exactly that—who practice in greater Minnesota. We are proposing to relieve 15 percent of their indebtedness for each of three years—that reduces it down by about 39 percent, I think. It's a great opportunity for students to be able to look at outstate and make that the right fit for them. We also have a variety of residency programs and dental residency

programs in greater Minnesota. And again that brings students who want that kind of lifestyle the opportunity to be out there. I visited one recently and talked to the young people there, and they said to a person that this is the life they want to have and they weren't coming back to the Twin Cities. So I think that the opportunity to expose them works, makes it interesting, and the loan forgiveness plan makes it feasible. So I think with those two things we can help address what could become a serious shortage in greater Minnesota.

Mickey: All right, great question, Larissa, thank you. Now Wing in Lauderdale has a question about Greek organizations. Wing, you're on live with the president, go ahead with your question.

Wing: Thank you. Hi, President Kaler. My question is, what is your stance on Greek organizations such as fraternities and sororities, and how do you support them and to what extent.

President Kaler: Great question. I am committed to a strong Greek life program on campus, much stronger than we are now. You may know that we are very near the bottom in the Big Ten in terms of the percentage of our students who are participating in Greek life. Studies show that engagement with Greek life has positive outcomes for students in terms of academic progress and job placement after graduation. I convened a task force on Greek life probably 9 months ago. Their report has been delivered and it outlines a clear path of how to improve engagement and opportunity for Greek life on campus. We are also building a new dormitory on 17th, between 4th and University. That has space for the incubation of Greek chapters who have either gone dark or otherwise left campus and that lets them come get a foothold and build a membership base. So at least one of those slots has been taken already by a sorority, and I'm excited about growing it. I'm about as positively disposed with growing the Greek life program on campus as I can be and look forward to its growth and success at the University of Minnesota.

Mickey: Great question Wing, thank you very much. Now we have a parent in Andover who has a question. Sharon, you're on live with the President. Go ahead with your question.

Sharon: Yes, thank you. I'm of the class of 1981 for speech communications and my daughter, Kristin Carlson, was moving in with you or right next to you this fall and was in a total crisis mode with something that was totally unrelated, but she is now in heaven. She is in the civil engineering at Frontier Hall, joining all the women's organizations pertaining to engineering and all the engineering courses, doing very well, and she absolutely thrives in large, bustling, vibrant environments and loves her professors, and I just wanted to thank you for providing such a wonderful environment for her. Not everything is perfect, as you know, but I'm just so thrilled, and so is she. She's just in heaven. But she got off to a rocky start. We were happening to be moving in and I thought, there's President Kaler right next to us, but she was in crisis mode because she lost her cellphone, but I thought it was a good sign. You were right next to us and I thought that's got to be a good omen, and she's having a wonderful time there, and I just wanted to thank you for all the work and everything that

goes in to the University of Minnesota. I mean we're just very, very happy with everything there.

President Kaler: Well that's delightful to hear. I really enjoy the opportunities that help the new students move in and the family dynamics is interesting to see. Sometimes the student's happy to be there, the parents aren't. Sometimes everybody's happy that they're going off to college and sometimes it seems like nobody's happy they're going off to college. It is an emotional time. I'm glad your daughter is thriving, and I wish her and you all the best. Thanks for calling.

Mickey: Thank you very much, Sharon. Lots of questions across the gamut tonight, President Kaler, so maybe we could ask a question—put folks in your shoes. So in your opinion, alums on the phone, what should be the University's highest priority? If you think financial aid should be the highest priority, please press 1, if you think undergraduate education, please press 2, solving the state's problems like the achievement gap or invasive species, press 3, curing and treating diseases, please press 4, and recruiting students from the nation and around the world, please press 5. Again, financial aid support 1, undergraduate education 2, solving the state's problems 3, curing and treating diseases 4, and recruiting students from and around the world 5. So we'll report those results back to you in a second. Right now we see that David in White Bear Lake has a question, looks like about athletics and academics. So David from White Bear Lake, please go ahead with your question, you're on live ... Hello David? David, you're on live with the president, go ahead with your question.

David: I'm sorry, I was on mute. President Kaler, my name is Dave Dahl, and I graduated in 1987 in aerospace engineering and mechanics from the Institute of Technology. I've been an avid sports fan my entire college career, as well as an alumnus. My question is really about how do we engage the alumni body at the University of Minnesota, which is enormous and spans the country, as well as the world, in promoting our sports programs, primarily football. We are one of the lowest contributors, from a university perspective, to the football program in the Big Ten, and if we're going to get out of the bottom of the organization of the Big Ten, how are we going to engage the alumnus in supporting the program as well as find additional funding at the University of Minnesota.

President Kaler: That's a great question, and you know a lot of people don't value athletics at a university, but I do. I think it's an important part of our public engagement and I think it's a way people come in to the U and watch the U. When I got here I was frustrated to find a sense of malaise around our football program. We haven't won a championship in so long, and so forth. I don't think the past is a very good predictor of the future in this case. But we need to rebuild, we've brought in a great coach. Jerry Kill is doing a terrific job in turning our program around, just as he's done at his two previous jobs in southern and northern Illinois. It's a process. I think part of it is building a better team, a winning team, that is engaging to our fans. Part of it is our ability to have student athletes be successful and playing an important role in the community, helping other people. Finally, it's facilities, and TCF stadium is a great location, it's an attractive venue for fans to come. So I think we need to build a more attractive, more successful football program and alums will get engaged.

Sometimes we're not very good at acting. I think we can have a greater engagement by athletics and the alumni association in reaching out and making communications and opportunities known and available. But I do think we're on the right track to do this with our coach and I look forward to watching them be successful.

Mickey: Ok, great. Thank you. Now we're going to go to Greg in St. Paul, who has a question about affordability and rankings at a research university. Greg you're on live, go ahead with your question.

Greg: Hi President Kaler, thanks for taking my call. Greg Breining, 1974 graduate of the journalism school. Anyway, I wanted to ask, giving the current level of funding, what it would take to simultaneously raise the rankings of the University of Minnesota comparable with UW Madison or UC Berkeley while also providing an affordable undergraduate degree.

President Kaler: Yes, that's a great question, and the answer to it has two parts. One is when you talk about a great research university, you talk about a great faculty. You talk about people who are at the top of their fields, fully engaged, who are going to be very successful researchers. And when you talk about affordability from an undergraduate point of view, you really look at a public institution that has a better partnership with the state. As I mentioned in response to an earlier question, my request to the state is to reinvest in its public research university and help us hold tuition down. Another component of our budgetary activity and a request from the state is to invest with us in four research initiatives that will help drive innovation and creativity at the University. Those are in the areas of research on food, research on water, robotics and a medical area called neuromodulation. So we're really looking for partnerships. It's also critically important to know that the great fraction of research dollars that we spend are generated competitively at the NIH or NSF or other federal agency, and our faculty compete really well for that. So the short answer is lining up the resources that enable investment by the state, a competitive research environment, hiring great faculty, and using our state partner to help us hold down tuition.

Mickey: All right, that was a great question, Greg. Before we go to the next question, we'll report back the poll results, and it's interesting, you all thinking about what the University's highest priority should be. It really came down to two things. Undergraduate education was the top priority of 44 percent of you, and financial aid support was the top priority of 31 percent of you. So nearly 3 out of 4 folks felt that aid and access to undergraduate education ought to be the top University priorities. Certainly there are lots of priorities and tough things for a president to juggle, but we'll take one more question here. We want to be cognizant of your time, we know there's lots of folks waiting on the line and you can go to [alumnicall.umn.edu](http://alumnicall.umn.edu) for more information, but before we finish up here we're going to go to Suzanne, who is in Excelsior. Suzanne, you're on live with your question, go ahead please.

Suzanne: Actually this is not Suzanne, but Suzanne's husband, and it's from Tonka Bay. I'm a graduate of '76 in engineering, '78 with an MBA. My wife is a '79 grad, and 2 of my 3 kids have gone to the University of Minnesota. There are a couple things, one comment is, it seems like Madison is out-marketing us in a worldwide image but I think we're a better U.



Secondly, I want to know, where do you want to leave your legacy? When you're done with your years, what do you want to be known for and where are you committing your capital to actually follow that legacy.

President Kaler: That's a great question and I do agree that we get out-marketed by some of our competitors, and we're working hard on making that no longer be the case. When I think of the University, I think about really two things. I think about excellence and I think about access for qualified Minnesota students. When I leave I want our reputation worldwide to be far better than it is now. I want it to be known as a place that's among the very best public research institutions in the country. That means that I'm putting my resources into hiring those great faculty that we need and being as careful and thoughtful as I can be about those research areas and about where we have the differential advantage to be truly great in more programs than we are now. And we are truly great in many of our programs. The access really does come down to two parts. One is controlling our costs as aggressively as possible and make sure we're returning value, and re-engaging the state of Minnesota as our partner in making the University of Minnesota affordable.

Mickey: All right. Great. President Kaler, final thoughts, please.

President Kaler: Thanks Mickey, I really have enjoyed this chance to hear from so many of you, and I know there are people we didn't get to, and I'm sorry about that and hopefully we'll do this again. We had almost 10,000 people join us at one time or another during the call, and I hope that it has been a good experience. I will remind you that we have cultural and educational and athletic events on campus almost every day. We have a new physics and nanotech building almost completed and the new Rec Center on the East Bank. The light rail construction, as enjoyable as that was, is nearly done on Washington Avenue. So if you haven't visited campus for a while I encourage you to come back. Springtime is a great time to visit your university. Thank you so much for taking my call and good night. Thanks again.

Mickey: Good night. Again, for more information: [alumnicall.umn.edu](http://alumnicall.umn.edu). Thank you all, good night.

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